

Best Practices Observed in the FY01 Recreational Fee Demonstration Evaluations

California

Contact: Tim Smith (tsmith@blm.gov)

Partnerships: The Desert District, and California in general, model some of the best community partnerships in the Bureau. Whether through subgroups of the Desert Advisory Council, working with cooperating associations, or forging new lines of communication with user groups, the Desert finds a way to engage the user communities in a such a way that produces successes that would be otherwise impossible to achieve.

Volunteers: Using volunteers, BLM has leveraged resources to provide services to the public that cannot be provided by BLM for lack of resources. Some volunteer programs revolve around environmental education; others focus on site cleanup and signing.

El Mirage

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The staff understands the needs on the ground and is actively engaged in visitor interactions. Their regular contact with visitors has created a positive environment that has led to safer and more informed visitor experiences. Greater law enforcement presence has reduced drug violations by as much as 80%, allowing for more families to want to come to El Mirage and feel safe during their visit.

Partnerships: A key to the success revolves around the partnerships that have been created. A partnership was established in 1990 with San Bernardino County, Los Angeles County, California State Parks, the California OHV Commission, and the Friends of El Mirage (a non-profit organization, formerly functioning as a steering group, that includes: American Motorcyclist Association, California Association of 4wd Clubs, California Off Road Vehicle Association, Community Members of El Mirage, Inland Empire Film Commission, Southern California Timing Association (dry lake time trails), and Wind Wizards (land sailors' group)).



Partnerships: The BLM meets monthly with the Friends of El Mirage in an advisory capacity. Other state and county agencies participate in these monthly meetings as well. The Friends group is actively engaged in a dialogue with BLM regarding the implementation of a fee program and park-wide maintenance and safety priorities. Through this partnership and grant funding provided by the "Green Sticker," nearly \$20 million has been invested in land acquisitions within El Mirage.

Imperial Sand Dunes

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Partnerships: Despite the rough start of the fee demo program at Imperial, it is currently a successful fee demo project, largely due to the partnership with the Imperial Technical Review Team (TRT). In 1999, the California Desert Advisory Council established the TRT to assist the BLM with the implementation of the fee demo program. Eleven individuals—representing Imperial County, Yuma County, State of AZ, CA DAC, San Diego Off Road Coalition, CA OHV Commission, BLM dunes patrol volunteers, CA Off Road Coalition, and a non-affiliated member—comprise the TRT. The TRT advises BLM on funding priorities for fee demo money and represents an important link to the various elements of the user community.

The partnership with the TRT and the American Sand Association led to the “Checker Flag” program, whereby riders display a checkered flag on their vehicles symbolizing, among others, support of Law Enforcement and responsible behavior. During the latter half of 2000, an independent non-profit organization, the American Sand Association was formed. When a settlement agreement associated with the Desert-wide lawsuit forced the closures of certain sections of Imperial, the American Sand Association organized a 300-person volunteer effort to install signs. Although the organization and its members oppose the closures and fees, they believed that getting the notification signs in place was essential to keeping the general area available for OHV recreation. The partnership’s work with BLM to accomplish the signing served as a high point for BLM personnel on the ground.

Collection of Fees: Imperial uses self-pay machines operated under a contract with Universal Parking. These machines are at the forefront of fee collection. By offering 16 self-pay machines, the visitors can use any of the machines in multiple locations. Although not directed in the contract, the vender assists the BLM with fee compliance during peak weekends by putting their own people on the ground. The vender makes regular enhancements to the system and the machines to increase the ease of use, the level of compliance, and the quality of the reports provided to the BLM.



Customer self-serve machines allow customer access to pay stations all hours. There is no need for the BLM funds for fee booth construction or fee collectors, and “collection acceptance regulations” are easily complied with, given one check a month being received and deposited from the contractor. Rangers do have to enforce fee compliance, which does use up ranger time. As fee collection on these sites become a wider accepted practice, less fee compliance monitoring may be needed.

Even though the relationship started off rocky, Universal Parking and BLM have worked to make the automatic pay stations successful. About two years ago the expectations of the two groups were discuss and that years Halloween had high compliance and high revenue. Now the staffing needs, signing, and other resources are shared to make the Imperial Fee Demo Program work.

Managing of Staff: This area functions as well as it does because of the people on the ground. According to the staff, the level of support provided by the field manager far surpasses anything in the past. During peak periods, the field manager even joins his staff on the ground to help with fee compliance and meeting general visitor needs. The commitment that the Dunes Manager, Neil Hamada, brings to the job energizes the rest of the staff. One of the field staff said that the quality and commitment of the entire staff “makes this hell enjoyable.” The level of dedication some of the seasonals bring to bear is also impressive. This year, John Unger developed, presented, and ultimately received approval for an expanded emergency management services program for the upcoming season. Greater EMS has long been a desire of the Imperial users. The TRT advanced the proposal as a priority for the area and \$90,000 of fee demo money will be devoted to the program.

Palm Springs

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Intra-agency Cooperation: The other LTVA sites and campgrounds in Palm Springs collect fees and have also produced satisfied users. Of particular note is the annual LTVA meeting that brings together all the LTVA sites in the system to address system-wide fees and guidelines.

Customer Service: The best experiences in the Palm Springs office revolve around following through on commitments. The staff believe their ability to actually keep the funds collected from each site invested in the site gain them credibility and the respect of the visitors. In the past, they have met with the visitors to lie out priorities for using fee demo money, including the installation of a telephone at the Midland LTVA (more than 2 miles away from the nearest telephone line).

Oregon

Wildwood

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Environmental Education and Partnerships: The two best aspects of Wildwood are its very extensive accessibility and the environmental education and interpretation on site. The educational component of the site is provided by two self-guided trails, which feature interpretive signs, models, and a very popular in-stream viewing structure for observing fish in their natural habitat. The site is also used by WolfTree, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides extensive youth education to Portland schools and other under-served schools. WolfTree has helped develop a unique partnership with the BLM, Forest Service, and several other public and private sponsors. Its Director, Dale Waddell, is an ex-Forest Service employee who has made this science and environmental education service a major community-based success. Their motto is: "Scientist for a day, steward for life". According to site management,



this partnership allows them to "do things we could never do by ourselves." As a best practice, the curriculum is general enough to be used at other similar sites.

Inter-agency Cooperation: A nearby Forest Service visitor center does sell Wildwood daily and annual vehicle passes.

Public Exposure: High point experiences for the staff include having very diverse visitors and their recreational uses of the site, as well as the discovery that visitors experience are exciting to the staff. Further, the development of the site has changed it from being "invisible" to a site of which the public and the State Office are much more aware. The Cascade Stream Watch trail and the environmental educational activities that accompany the facility have brought lots of VIP tours (including a visit from former Secretary Babbitt), media coverage, and features in magazines.

Yaquina Head

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Business Practices: This site is a well run, well organized operation. The staff have the tools and training to operate the site as an effective business. It's records and procedures are exemplary, having reconciled books that are fully in line with BLM records.

Partnerships: The site has extensive partnerships for community involvement, leveraging of its labor force, and furthering the environmental education mission of the site. Its friends group, Yaquina Lights, Inc., a not for profit organization, has helped to augment the Yaquina Head resources. Donations have increased over four fold in four years, now reaching \$29,000 per year. These funds are extremely important to Yaquina Head, as it is not included in the substantial pipeline funding available to some other recreation sites in OR.

Environmental Education: The Yaquina Head commitment to environmental education and interpretation are also exemplary. Michael Noack, the Yaquina Head Chief Park Ranger, has developed the educational and interpretation training. His customer service attitude is infectious. His personal example and the training provided helps his staff deliver a high level of customer service to Yaquina Head visitors. Trained seasonal staff conduct regularly scheduled interpretation and education events that are a key aspect of the continued attraction of the site to its publics. A new whale watching film has been just completed and should increase revenue and expand the Yaquina Head educational opportunities. Annual mailings about the tidal pool are sent out to stimulate increased use of the site. The reservation system works well to manage capacity at the tidal pools.

Contracting: It has a contract for restroom cleaning. Staff inspect restrooms daily. Visitors compliment Yaquina Head on the cleanliness **and upkeep of the restrooms.**

Public Relations: Regular community communication is maintained and it's regularly featured in national and regional publications.

Accessibility: It has also worked hard to provide extensive accessibility to all of its areas of interest. Several staff mention interaction at the tidal pools with disabled public as high-point experiences in their work. The level of accessibility, coupled with the effective design, has resulted in several awards for Yaquina Head, including the BLM National Recreation Award.

Tyee

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Law Enforcement: Tyee maintains a law enforcement occupied trailer on-site, with LE presence, as part of its agreement with the County Sheriff's Office.

Partnerships: Extensive improvements made by Boy Scouts and prison inmate crews have helped to keep expenses down.

Loon Lake

Contact: Bob Golden (bgolden@blm.gov)

Customer Service: A key feature of the management of the staff at Loon Lake is the extensive emphasis on customer service. Staff are encouraged to go out of their way to help visitors in any way. Further, seasonal staff gets one week of training at the beginning of the season which emphasizes customer service, rules for use, safety, first aid, etc. This curriculum could be shared broadly. Staff also attend a weekly staff meeting where Loon Lake concerns are managed and consistency of rules are addressed.

One customer feedback card suggested beepers be handed out to customers waiting in line to get into the campground. With beepers, customers would not have to stand in line for hours, could go into the campground and have a picnic or swim, yet still be notified when their "number came up". The staff took this advice and purchased (with Recreational Fee Demonstration Program money), beepers for their customers. The beepers, like those used by restaurants, are used to bring usage of six reserved campsites up to absolute capacity during peak periods. Since six campsites are reserved through a reservation system, Reservations NW, when a camper leaves one of the six sites it may be available for a few hours for day use or for other campers to move into early. The beeper process helps to allow the maximum number of users to access these facilities. Further, it provides some flexibility for management to use disability sites held until 5:00 p.m. to be used by others if disabled people don't need those sites. Feedback has been extremely positive.

Another suggestion was to install soap containers in bathrooms – which staff also implemented. Generally, customers to this recreation area are generational – families have been returning to Loon Lake year after year. Staff states this, alone, makes Loon Lake different than other fee sites. Customers love Loon Lake and regardless of fee, they will come.

Interpretive and Education Program: The interpretive and environmental education programs offered at the amphitheater are great examples of site use that furthers the



BLM educational mission. A long-term seasonal employee has been managing and conducting the majority of this program. This employee was aided by the former District interpretive specialist.

The annual Loon Lake celebration is a family-oriented celebration that emphasizes the environmental and community aspects of the site. In cooperation with the OR Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, big fish are stocked in the lake to facilitate youth fishing and capture of big fish and optimal recreation experiences.

Accessibility: Picnic tables are accessible. All campsites and restrooms are being rebuilt to ADA standards.

Row River Trail and Sharps Creek

Contact: Joseph Williams (j2williams@blm.gov)

Partnerships: These two sites, Row River Trail and Sharps Creek, are examples of taking a “private liability and turning it into a public asset.” The Row River rails to trails project has dramatically improved a community that was beset by drug abuse, by providing a Federal presence, lightly developing the area, and bringing recreation and law enforcement into the area. Further, a trail head host has helped to manage use of the site. Finally, the trail has a supplemental rule to ban the use of alcohol on the site. On one end the trail runs through Cottage Grove and the partnership with the community has brought help and notoriety to the site.

User Surveys: The park ranger would like to have a local site-specific user survey. Best practices from other sites suggest cooperating with a not-for-profit or chamber of commerce to develop and help with the survey (e.g. Tyee Recreation Area). Such surveys have been shown to be useful in providing ready feedback to the staff from visitors.